

# Short Notes



## Birding at the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, north-eastern Zaire

Marco Sacchi

The Okapi Wildlife Reserve is situated between 1°N–2°29'N and 28°E–29°4'E in north-eastern Zaire. The designated forest reserve covers an area of 13,500 km<sup>2</sup> and occurs between 700–1,000 m altitude. It consists predominantly of primary forest (90 percent) with some secondary forest, cultivation and waterways making up the remainder. Although the reserve is traversed by the trans-African highway access is not always straightforward. The reasons for this are the poor road conditions and lack of public transport. However, those who make it there, will be rewarded with some of the best birding Africa has to offer.

The reason for our visit was to conduct a ranger training programme in ornithology and herpetology. The aim was to train guides to enable them to organise birdwalks, as part of an interpretive programme for general tourists. After a few weeks attuning ourselves to this unique avifauna we started a three-week intensive training course with a group of local rangers. An introduction into the basic principles and methodology of ornithology was supplemented by practical training sessions in the field. During the excursions the emphasis was placed on correct identification, whereas in the theory sessions we tried to provide the participants with some background knowledge that allowed them to place the different species into an ecological context. We were overwhelmed by the enthusiasm and observation skills of the participants. The course turned out to be a great success, potentially providing the park with additional and much needed revenue from tourism.



Chocolate-backed Kingfisher  
*Halcyon badia*  
John Gale

From Epulu, the park headquarters, we explored several habitat types such as the primary forest (composed of mixed species or dominated by *Gilbertiodendron* spp), secondary forest, cultivations and riverine habitat. The official park list totals an amazing 379 species, 30 of which we managed to add during our three-month stay at the reserve. This number is likely to rise as other observers venture into this part of the Ituri Forest. However, large tracts of the reserve still remain totally unexplored by birders, with less than 5 percent of the area having been visited.

The incredible species richness of the reserve's avifauna is not always obvious at first sight. It takes a few days and a lot of patience to spot the many shy and skulking species that make birding a challenge. Of course there are also many conspicuous and ever present species like the Great Blue Turacos *Corythaeola cristata*, Palm-nut Vultures *Gypobierax angolensis*, Giant Kingfishers *Ceryle maxima* and the Rock Pratincoles *Glareola nuchalis*, that breed on the rocks in the Epulu River.

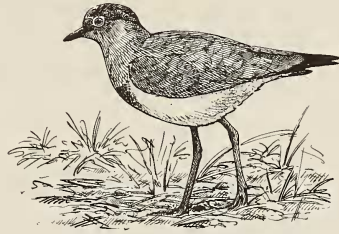
There is no room here to do justice to all the interesting species that we observed. However, I would like to mention a few that deserve attention. From the seven species recorded at the reserve that are listed in the IUCN Red Data Book, we managed to locate Yellow-legged Weaver *Ploceus flavipes*, Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni* and Sassi's Greenbul *Phyllastrephus lorenzi* (the others being Golden-naped Weaver *Ploceus aureonucha*, Nahan's Francolin *Francolinus nahani*, and Bedford's Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone bedfordi*). Furthermore we particularly enjoyed seeing Olive *Bostrychia olivacea* and Spot-breasted Ibis *B. rara*, Long-tailed Hawk, Cassin's Hawk-eagle *Spizaetus africanus*, a large flock of 56 roosting Brown-chested Wattled Plovers *Vanellus*



Long-tailed Hawk  
*Urotriorchis macrourus*  
John Cox



Yellow-legged Weaver *Ploceus flavipes*  
Mark Andrews



Brown-chested Watted Lapwing  
*Vanellus superciliosus*  
Mark Andrews

knowledge, represents a range-extension for this species. The observation of an immature Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* was further evidence that this species has started very recently to expand its winter range to tropical Africa.

*superciliosus*, Bare-cheeked Trogon *Apaloderma aequatoriale*, ten species of Kingfisher including White-bellied *Corythornis leucogaster*, Blue-breasted *Halcyon malimbica* and Chocolate-backed Kingfisher *H. badia*, Black *Merops gularis* and Blue-headed Bee-eater *M. muelleri*, seven species of Hornbill including White-thighed *Ceratogymna cylindricus albotibialis*, Piping *C. fistulator*, Black Casqued Wattle *C. atrata*, White-crested *Tockus albocristatus*, Black Dwarf *T. bartlaubi* and Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill *T. camurus*, Green-breasted Pitta *Pitta reichenowi* and Blue-shouldered Robin-Chat *Cossypha cyanocampter*. An unusual sighting was a European Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* perched on a rainforest tree. We also observed a pair of Gosling's *Apalis apalisingi* with two recently hatched young which, to our

For those interested in this outstanding place, an annotated checklist of the avifauna of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve is currently being completed, covering all 379 species recorded to date. It will be available from November 1996 for UK£ 10/US\$ 20 (cash; incl. postage and handling). It can be ordered from M. Sacchi, Breitfeldstrasse 44, CH-3014 Bern, Switzerland.

Breitfeldstrasse 44, 3014 Bern, Switzerland. Tel +(0)31/332 78 12.

## Recent observations of birds in the Comoros

Jon Hornbuckle

### Introduction

The Comoros islands, situated in the Indian Ocean between Madagascar and Tanzania, consist of the Islamic Republic of the Comoros and the French protectorate of Mayotte, but are rarely visited by birders. I spent two weeks there, from 3–16 November 1995, with Ashley Banwell, Neil Bostock and Alan Lewis. We made a number of interesting observations during our travels on Mayotte and the three main islands of the Comoros — Grand Comore, Anjouan and Moheli.

**Wilson's Storm-Petrel** *Oceanites oceanicus*. A single bird seen on the 7th, 3–4 km offshore from Moheli near MiChaco, the rocky islet nesting site for Masked Boobies *Sula dactylatra*, and two noted on the crossing between Moheli and Grand Comore on the 9th appear to be only the second and third records for the Comoros<sup>1</sup>.

**Masked Booby** *Sula dactylatra*. c80 nesting at M' Chaco, some 5 km off the coast of Moheli, on the 7th.

**Reunion (Malagasy) Harrier** *Circus maillardi*. A pair above La Convalescence on Mt Karthala, Grand

Comore on the 4th; at least 4 birds around Kangani on the 7th and one bird on the ridge above Fomboni, Moheli, on the 9th. These records indicate that this numerically scarce species may be fairly widespread.

**Frances' Goshawk (Sparrowhawk)** *Accipiter francesii*. Apart from a single record from Grand Comore, this species was only seen on Mayotte where there was a territorial pair and at least one other bird at Combani on the 14–15th.

**Eleonora's Falcon** *Falco eleonora*. Singles at Moroni, Grand Comore on the 9th; Kangani, Moheli on the 7th, and Lac Dzilandze, Anjouan on the 12–13th. Three birds at Combani, Mayotte on the 14th are likely to have been on passage, presumably to Madagascar. The only previous confirmed records were two on Moroni in Nov 1831 and one on Mt Karthala on 8 April 1902.

**Little Stint** *Calidris minuta*. One at Padmanzi Lagoon on the 15th appears to be the first record for Mayotte and only the third record for the Comoros<sup>3</sup>.

**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo*. Two between Moheli